

BRAINS



RAWR 03

Do good people go to heaven when they DIE?



No, people do not go to either heaven or hell at death. They go to their graves to await the resurrection day.

Brains, Vol. 1, July 2003, brainszine@yahoo.com

by Jesse & Ryan with help from Mike, Lindsey, Dave & Lily

Art by Rawr (front, back, last page) & Threat (Max, flyer) www.onedaywar.com

Excuse me, could you spare 62 cents? Thank you very much! Oh, I'm fine thanks, and you? Yeah, people don't usually stop an talk to me. Nobody listens to an old drunk. Been drinking on the streets for 17 years now. Well, no, not always these streets. I drank on the streets of Santa Fe. Streets of San Francisco. Drank a lot up in Seattle. Lost this finger one winter in Denver. Did some time in LA county. You know, I been around.

Yeah, I went to Vietnam too. Saw some awful things there, but that ain't why I started drinking. No sir. It was seeing what the dead do to the living that made me hit the bottle. Maybe you know what I mean, maybe you don't. Not everybody does. But believe me, some things'll give you the creeps an shivers so bad only a bottle or two'll fix it. Old E. Mad Dog. Whiskey. Vodka. If I was you, I'd be heading down to the liquor store right about now.

Because we're right in the middle of it! Yup, here we are. Just you an me. Right *smack* in the middle of it all. Damndest thing, too. I been all over, even to Canada, but this here is the epicenter. *This here town*. Dunno why exactly. But it is. So watch yerself. Specially after dark. Get an axc or something. Me? I use a hammer.

Scuse me now, ain't trying to be rude, but I gotta take a leak. Never mind me. Nobody does. Just another homeless alcoholic found dead down by the tracks, head cracked open. It's no big deal. Who cares? It's like we ain't really here anyways. Not to *you*. No. But when all us lowlifes is gone, who you think they gonna come after next? Eh? Yeah, that's right! Don't listen to *me*! I'm just a crazy old drunk!

The Last Straight Edger

The kid was walking down the sidewalk lost in his own thoughts. He didn't notice the man sitting on the bucket until he spoke.

"Excuse me, could you spare 62 cents?" asked the man.

"Maybe." The kid stopped and shoved his hand in his pocket with out thinking.

"Looks like another fine day," said the man.

"I guess so," said the kid, holding out a quarter.

"Thank you very much," he said from behind his giant, dirt-gray beard. He took the quarter and put it in the pocket of his giant, dirt-gray parka.

"Actually," said the kid, looking up at the miserable, overcast sky, "it looks like it's gonna rain."

"Well, it's all the same to me and the bucket," he said. It was a green, plastic, five-gallon bucket. He stood up and rummaged around in it, pulling out a bottle of Big Bear malt liquor still two-thirds full.

"Care for a drink?" Bucket asked.

"No way!" said the kid, looking down at him. "I'm straight edge!"

"Straight edge?" he said innocently. "What's that?"

"I don't drink alcohol," said the kid.

He frowned deeply. "You mean... you don't drink *at all*? What about cough syrup?"

"No drugs, no alcohol, no poison," said the kid. "It gives me the edge. That shit just slows you down. The system wants you pacified."

Bucket poured some malt liquor into his paper coffee cup and put the lid back on.

"It's also bad for your liver," said the kid.

"Well, yeah, your liver," he said, "but what about your brain?"

The kid looked puzzled for a moment, opened his mouth, then closed it.

"This ain't exactly a good neighborhood, if you know what I mean," Bucket said.

The kid didn't seem to. He looked about 20 years old, wearing glasses and a red hooded sweatshirt with little pins on it that said stuff like 'Judge' and 'The Real Enemy.' He looked tired.

"You ain't from around here, are you?" said Bucket.

"No," said the kid. "I'm from the East coast."

"Well, do you got, uh-" He leaned in, seriously, voice hushed. "D'you got the *unalive* out there?"

The kid looked in through all the whiskers to the tramp's eyes, glinting like light on water at the bottom of the well.

"There were a couple in our town," the kid said, "but not like it is out here. I never really knew they..." He trailed off.

"What?"

"They killed my friends," the kid said quietly. "But we never had any problems til we came out west." He frowned, and his eyes scrunched up a little like he wanted to start crying.

"I'm real sorry to hear about your friends," said Bucket. "I know how ya feel. They killed plenty a people round hear. They got Cricket, even Bill Montana."

The kid sighed.

"Why don't you sit down for awhile?" Bucket said. "It ain't raining yet. Sit down."

The kid sat down on the sidewalk cross-legged next to the bucket and put his head in his hands.

"Excuse me, could you spare 62 cents?" Bucket asked a woman in a long brown jacket as she walked by.

"I'm sorry, no," she said.

"Well, have a nice day then ma'am."

He sipped his cup and thought for a moment and then turned to the kid. "Your friends, were they straight edge too?"

"Yeah. Our whole band was, even our roadie. We were called Positively Correct. We were on tour, but..." The kid trailed off again, still looking at the sidewalk in front of him.

"What happened?"

"Well, first, Josh disappeared. He was our roadie. He had been talking about quitting and going back home, and when we got to Denver, he helped us set up for the show, but after our set we couldn't find him. His back pack was missing, and we figured he must've given up on us and started hitchhiking back east, but we'd call home, and no one there had heard from him. He just vanished.

"Then we drove over some nails on the freeway in California one night and lost two tires. We were only a couple of miles from the next town, so Adam and Skuf set out on foot, and I stayed behind to guard the van. An hour later, Skuf comes running back covered in blood, screaming and yelling. He's all incoherent, and I calm him down and ask what happened.

"He said that him and Adam came upon a house just off the highway exit, and they went and knocked on the door and asked to use the phone. It was an old man and woman who lived there, and they let them in to call a tow truck. He said it looked exactly like his grandparents house, except these old people, they were *really* old, too old to even be up and walking around any more, except they still were, and their skin was all shriveled up like leather. Then Adam screams, and blood squirts everywhere, because the old man has a *meat cleaver*, and it's stuck in Adam's head! Then the old

woman comes at Skuf with a kitchen knife and chases him into the yard, but he outruns her.

"Skuf had lost it. He went nuts. It's like he lost contact with reality. He got totally paranoid, and he wouldn't ever get out of the van after that except to piss. I had to walk into town and get a tow. By morning we'd fixed our flats, and we got the hell out of there. We ended up heading north on I-5, and Skuf was driving. It was really hot out, and this car pulls up alongside us honking its horn. The guys inside are hanging out the windows pointing at our van and shouting like something's wrong. Skuf slows down a little thinking he'll pull over, and the car slows down too. They're still pointing and shouting, and he's going 'Okay, okay, okay, I got it.' He steps on the brakes, but they slow down again too, still right along side us.

"Then, suddenly, he steps on it, and the van lurches forward, and he starts screaming, 'They're gonna kill us! We're gonna fucking die!' I didn't know if he'd finally cracked, or what, but we're careening through traffic, weaving between cars, and these guys follow us the whole time! Well, luckily, there was traffic congestion, and the car got stuck somewhere behind us, and after that we never saw them again.

"So Skuf calms down for awhile, and we decide it's my turn to drive. We pull over at a rest stop about half an hour south of here, and he has to take a piss. He says, 'Keep the engine running, and if that car shows up, honk the horn until I come out, okay?' He goes in the rest room, and some woman follows him in. I think, that's weird, but I've gotta keep watch, so I sit tight. Then someone else goes in, and Skuf doesn't come out, and now I'm starting to get paranoid, so I start honking the horn, but he doesn't come out.

"I run into the rest room, and there's three of them in there, and they got Skuf pinned face down on the floor, and one of them's sitting on his back with a tire iron, and there's blood everywhere, because they've bashed his head open! His brains are hanging out, and the zombie drops the tire iron and grabs Skuf's head and buries his face in it like he was eating a watermelon! I ran at them, and they, fucking, look at this--"

The kid pulled down the hood of his sweatshirt. He had short brown hair and on one side a fresh bite-sized scab where the brain eater had taken a mouthful of his scalp right out. It didn't look like the hair would ever grow back.

"Our crew, we always said we'd be straight edge til death. I just never expected death to come so soon, and not like this. They're everywhere out here! I got into town last night, and I tried to sleep in my van over by the park, but the zombies found me. There were at least a half dozen of them. They started banging on the windows and trying to open the doors and rocking the van back and forth. I jumped up, started it and took off. I drove over at least one of them. Smashed the fucker. After that, I parked at the Minit-Market, but I still haven't slept."

"Like I say," said Bucket, "this ain't exactly a good neighborhood." He stood up, retrieved his bottle and poured the last of the malt liquor into his cup. He put the empty bottle away and sat back down.

There was a long, comfortable silence.

"But where do *you* sleep?" asked the kid.

"Oh, me? Pretty much anywhere," said Bucket. "Down by the park is good, and there's an empty lot over on Blair. In the winter I know a couple of porches I can sleep on as long as I'm gone by sunrise."

"But the zombies," said the kid. "What about the zombies? Don't they try to get you at night?"

"Sometimes. Not so much. I can drink a lot, you know. More than Cricket. Even more than Bill Montana, God rest his soul. I can drink so much that..." He paused and looked up.

"Excuse me sir, could you spare 62 cents?"

The two men walking by didn't even look down at him. They just continued ahead wordlessly.

"Have a nice day," said Bucket.

"You're drunk," said the kid.

"Well, not yet," he contested. "It's not even 8 o'clock yet."

"You're in denial," said the kid.

"Well, yeah. I'm an alcoholic!"

"That's what *I'm* saying!" said the kid. "You need to go to Alcoholics Anonymous!"

"Oh, yeah. I did that," said Bucket, "but that only made it worse."

"What are you talking about?"

Bucket leaned towards the kid, and his voice took a serious tone.

"Alcoholics Anonymous is a zombie conspiracy," he said.

The kid sighed, and put his head in his hands.

"No, really! I got busted for drinking in public, and the judge made me choose between two weeks in jail or four weeks in AA, and I chose the AA. We started every meeting by going around the room and introducing ourselves. You say your name, you're an alcoholic. Like that. But this one guy, well, he was a zombie."

The kid looked up. "A zombie alcoholic?"

"Yes sir, he was a zombie. He said he was an alcoholic, and that he'd decided to sober up after dying in a drunk driving accident. And let me tell you, by the smell of him, I'd say he was working on his hundred day pin. It looked like he'd gone right through the windshield face first, and the mortician had glued his skin back in place, but it was starting to peel off again, and he'd started using band-aids to hold it on. I think maybe some flies had laid some eggs in his forehead too, because..." He paused and looked up.

"Excuse me, could you spare 62 cents?"

"Get a job," said the man.

"Have a nice day," said Bucket. He sucked at his cup, and a little beer dribbled into his beard, which he wiped with his sleeve.

"That was just the first day of AA. On the second day there were two zombies, since the first one brought a friend. He said he was a lawyer, actually, and his skin was all yellow and sick looking. He'd died from liver failure, Cirrhosis. Drank himself to death between court cases. When he shook my hand, it was as cold as a fish, and I looked into his eyes, even the whites of his eyes had turned yellow.

"On the third day there was another, a woman. She was a housewife and said she'd died of alcohol poisoning, but you couldn't barely tell with all her make up. She was real nice looking and real friendly. They all were. Seemed like good people. They were especially talkative with the living, and they were making friends, especially with this one guy, an older, bald headed guy. Retired Army Sergeant. Said he'd served under an unalive CO in the service.

"Well, anyways, the next day, there was another new zombie joining our group, and he was real friendly and talkative, but what no one seemed to notice was that the Army Sergeant, he wasn't there. There was no sign of him, and he never did come back after that either. So what the heck? Had he switched to a different group? Had he been cured of the, you know, the alcoholism? Or was he off sitting on some bar stool somewhere? That's what I wanted to know.

"The day after that there were a couple more of these Necros joining our group and another of the living had disappeared. It was my second week that I finally did a head count, and there were like twelve zombie alcoholics and only six living alcoholics. New members were joining every day, but every day the group got a little smaller..." He paused and looked up.

A young woman walked by pushing a baby in a stroller. Bucket nodded to her, saying nothing. After she'd passed, he sipped his cup.

"I started to worry, some serious worry. I knew if I quit going to AA before my four weeks was up, well, there would be a warrant for my arrest, and that wouldn't be much safer. Did you know that downtown they even got zombies working in the jail?"

"What?" said the kid. "Really?"

"Yeah. How do you think they got Cricket?" said Bucket. "So I kept going to the AA, and sure enough, the next day there were a couple more people missing, but with some new dead guy there going, 'My name's so-and-so, and I'm an alcoholic too!'

"So I pulled aside the guy with the clip board, and I said, 'Haven't you noticed all the *Necros*, how they're taking over, and there's fewer and fewer of *our* kind every day?' But this guy, he wouldn't listen. He got all offended, thought I said *Negroes*, and he started calling me a racist. But I'm no racist, dang it! I love everybody the same!"

"Except zombies, brain eaters and the undead," said the kid.

"Damn straight!" Bucket bellowed. He put his cup to his lips and threw his head back, one shot. He burped and put his empty cup in the pocket of his parka.

"After that, I went out and relapsed," he continued. "Drank wine down by the train tracks all night, and I woke up the next day about one o'clock when the train went by. When I realized I was late for the AA, I freaked out, and ran to the church—It was at a church—and I ran in, and I sat down just as the last person finished talking, and everyone turned to look at me. So I stood up and said, ya know, 'Hi, my name's Bucket, and I'm an alcoholic, an I been sober for... uh...'

"The guy sitting next to me, it was the same guy who called me a racist, he points at me an says, 'You're *drunk*! You're drunk *right now*!' An dammit if he wasn't right, because I was still drunk from the night before! An I look around the room, an they were all walking corpses, every single one of them, from the car-wreck-faced zombie to a Hare Krishna zombie!"

"A Hare Krishna zombie?" said the kid.

"Yeah! Me an the guy with the clip board were the only alcoholics left alive. So I shout at them, 'You're all zombies! The *undead*! You killed Cricket! You ate Bill Montana from the Homeless Veterans Coalition!' An they all started to stand up, one by one.

"But the guy with the clipboard, he jumps up an says, 'Don't listen to him, everybody. He's drunk! He's a crazy drunk racist!' But the zombies charged with their bony fingers and rancid breath, hungry for brains! They grabbed..." He paused and looked up.

"Excuse me ma'am, could you spare 62 cents?"

The woman had a mean looking dog on a leash, but she gave him a dollar bill.

"Thank you kindly ma'am. You have a nice day!" said Bucket.

He turned to the kid. "I tell you, askin for 62 cents is the key. It's just like askin for 50 cents, cept half the time they go ahead and give you the whole buck. I got enough for another bottle now!" He stood up and grabbed his bucket by the handle.

"But wait," said the kid, jumping to his feet. "The zombies, they were rushing towards you. They were gonna kill you and eat your brain!"

"No, no. Not *my* brain," said Bucket. "They ate the guy sitting next to me. He was sober. Zombies always prefer the brains of the sober. I dunno why exactly. I guess they just taste better."

The kid blinked.

"How d'you think I get away with sleeping in the park at night?" said Bucket. "I can drink more than any man in this town."

Right then it started to rain a little, just a light misty rain, but with a hint of more to come.

"Look, kid, what's yer name?"

"Aaron," said the kid.

"Aaron, great. Why don't we go over to the Minit-Market an then go sit under the bridge? It'll be dry, at least. I got some more stories you might wanna hear."

"Okay," Aaron said. "Sure."

They started off down the sidewalk together.

"Acshually," said Bucket. "D'you got ID? Cause maybe you could buy. The owner told me I'm not allowed on the property no more."

"Oh," said Aaron. "Yeah. I got ID."

Squat or Rot

Max was a menacing figure at night and especially in northeast, which was often called "the bad part of town." He was six feet tall and clad all in black, from his beanie cap down to his boots. There was an open beer in the pocket of his leather jacket, and he carried a metal flashlight in one hand like it was a weapon. But it was Max who was scared to walk around alone in the neighborhood, especially on weeknights when not many people were out.

It wasn't really a bad neighborhood, he thought, not totally. Rents were still cheap, and the buildings were still old—in the good way—and there was still grass growing in the cracks of the sidewalks. And northeast had really cool alleys.

Unfortunately, it did get a little worse every day, especially at night, because zombies don't sleep. The number of murders and disappearances in this neighborhood had been increasing, but he knew better than to think it was because of drugs and gangs, like the cops said. No one really expected the police department, headed by a zombie, Chief Croaker, to care about a few missing black kids, Mexicans, or homeless people. Or punks like Max.

He heard the car rolling up behind him before he saw its headlights. He glanced over his shoulder, and sure enough there was a new model car following him about half a block back.

Without deciding to, he began walking faster. He could feel the panic rising in his veins. That was a car full of undead yuppies following him, as sure as his socks were black. They were cruising, looking to score, hungry for brains.

Max broke into a run, and he heard the car accelerate. It sped up along side him, and he looked over to see a teenage boy launch a Big Gulp smack into his face.

"U.S.A.!" shouted the kid.

The car sped off around the corner with squealing tires.

Max stopped, wheezing, heart pounding, and dripping cold. It hadn't been zombies at all, just some jocks in their dad's car. He pulled a cigarette out of an inside pocket and lit it. He licked his lips. It was a diet cola, and it was starting to get sticky.

He continued on his trek up 18th Street towards the address. It was a guy named Dagger who had told him about this place, a big, old, abandoned house nestled between two empty warehouses. Dagger had said he squatted there, and it was going to be destroyed by the Economic Development Committee.

That caught Max's attention, because he had always hated the EDC and the way they demolished perfectly good old houses to build upscale condos for a higher class of resident. And these predatory zombies just helped the gentrification process along by whittling away at the underclass, literally eating the poor to make room for the rich.

Max had even attended a ROOTS meeting in an attempt to forge an alliance between the anarchist-punks and the African-American group with the cumbersome name Resisting Overt Occupation Through Strategy. But the Minister of Self-Defense had rebuffed him, charging that the punks were a tool of gentrification themselves.

"Y'all look half-dead anyway," he told Max. "All pale and dressed in black. You move in here, and these zombie motherfuckers say, 'Hey, our kind of people.'"



Max had tried not to get defensive, and he tried to talk about ways the punks could help stave off developers in northeast, but it was no use. He had always been terrible at political debate. He preferred action—direct action—not talk.

He didn't know if this guy Dagger had any politics at all, but he seemed willing to help. An organized squat in this part of town could be of strategic use in a direct fight against gentrification.

At O'Bannon Street there was a big, empty warehouse on each corner. He went half a block further and turned down O'Bannon Alley, walking past the Dead End sign.

The Alley was dark and overgrown. On his right was the back side of a warehouse and on his left a chain link fence that protected the ass end of some dilapidated retail space. Gripping his flashlight, Max continued, walking past empty lots to the end of the alley, where he came to the last and only house.

"Shit, what a monster," he whispered when he saw it. Surrounded by the larger buildings, the house was cast in shadows so that only its silhouette could be seen, three stories tall, with a quadruple-peaked roof and two chimneys. The front gate had a rusted pad lock, so Max climbed over the crumbling brick fence into the yard, which was a sea of yellow grass and uprooted flagstones. He sat against the fence and pulled another beer out of his backpack.

The house had a nice big front porch. The windows were covered in white sheets, and no light shone through. He chugged his beer, trying to revive his buzz. He neglected to belch, and then crept up onto the wood porch. He knocked gingerly, not entirely certain he wanted in. Then he tried the knob, but it was locked.

He made his way around to the driveway on the left hand side of the house. Most of the paint had peeled off the siding and blown away long ago. There was no garage. Could this house pre-date the automobile?

He tried the knob on the side door, but it was locked too. He squatted there and inspected the lock with his flashlight. It looked new. He was considering the possibility of picking it, when a pair of headlights started coming down the alley.

"Shit!" He ran around behind the house, but the warehouse that had gone up behind it must've been built directly on the property line, because the back yard was nothing but a gap of about 18 inches. He squeezed into the gap and hid.

The car pulled up to the house and into the driveway and parked close enough that Max could hear the blaring stereo. It was a Misfits song. Dagger!

Max stepped out from behind the house and approached the driver.

"Hey man, sorry I'm late," said Dagger, slamming the car door. "Looks like you already found the place."

"Yeah," said Max. He looked at the car. It was a red, four-door Mazda and almost new. "You just park right here?" he asked.

"Sure man, no one cares," said Dagger. "The house is empty. There's no neighbors. This is the fucking ghetto, dude."

Max took a look at Dagger. His face was painted banshee white, with dark circles around his eyes, but he must have used the cheap Halloween makeup from the dollar store, because it made his skin look waxy. He wore a leather jacket with twice its own weight in chains crisscrossing the front, back and shoulders, and his hair was dyed black and combed forward into a devilock that hung between his eyes.

"Let me show you the property," said Dagger, unlocking the side door.

Max sniffed. Dagger was wearing a lot of cologne.

"Man, you stink," said Dagger. "Are you drunk?"

"Of course," said Max. He pulled a tallboy from his backpack. "D'you want a beer?" he offered.

"That's alright," said Dagger. "I'm pretty fucked up already." He stepped into the dark of the house and disappeared.

Max popped the beer open, took a gulp and hurried to catch up. The pantry was empty and led into a kitchen with bare cupboards hanging open. He poked the corners of the room with his flashlight beam. Nice wood floors. High ceilings. Cool old archways.

"What's upstairs?" Max asked Dagger.

"Nothing. Come check out the basement. It's cool."

Max ignored him and walked off through the archway into the empty dining room.

Now Dagger followed. "Hey, you like MDC?" he said, remembering why he had chosen Max.

"Yeah, they rule," he said, inspecting the electrical outlets.

"I've got an original pressing of the Millions of Dead Children EP on vinyl," said Dagger.

Max looked up. "Really?"

"Yeah, it's in the basement. Come on, let me show you." Dagger led him back into the kitchen and opened a door. "Down there," he said.

Max descended the staircase with his flashlight illuminating the steps. The stairs were steep and looked like actual stone, carved in place rather than laid. And it stunk. It stunk real bad, like something had died. He wanted to grab his nose, but he squeezed his beer tighter instead.

"You keep your records down here?" said Max in disbelief as he stepped down onto the stone floor of the basement and shone his light around.

"Brains!" shouted a voice from the dark.

He spun around to see a zombie lunging for him. Without thinking, he tried to club it in the head with his flashlight, but cocking his arm back to strike illuminated the ceiling in a brief, confusing moment, and he swung

blindly into the darkness. The zombies tackled him, and the flashlight slipped from his hand.

Rotten stubs of teeth pierced his skin. He screamed, hot blood poured across his face, and his jeans soaked up spilled beer. Then he pissed himself.

They cracked his head open with a camping hatchet and tasted the brain skeptically without forks.

"Bad taste," said the first zombie, chewing, but not sure if he should spit or swallow.

"Sorry," said Dagger. "He's been drinking." He could care less, having already eaten. He kept all of the best brains for himself.

The zombie swallowed with a pained expression. "Gross," he said, spitting a little, but not wasting any of the precious food.

"Yeah, but check out his jacket," said Dagger. It was a black leather jacket with a hand painted mural on back depicting a skull wearing a cop's hat. Beneath it "Millions of Dead Cops" was inscribed.

"So cool!" said Dagger. "It'll look great on you." He stripped the jacket off the carcass and handed it to the zombie. "Here, try it on," he said. "Oh yeah. That's... that's so fucking punk!"

Punk was all that mattered to Dagger. He lived for punk. You might say that he'd died for punk. Or, more accurately, ever since he died, he'd felt born again—born again punk.

Death had been his big break from his old life, a life he'd wasted as a real estate salesman. He had been successful at his chosen career, and he'd worked many 80 hour weeks to inch his way up the corporate ladder at the Economic Development Committee. But there had always been a nagging sensation that life lacked real excitement, and this had lead him down a perilous path of shallow thrills. He'd tried Marxism, Christianity and then Scientology. Then he'd tried bungee jumping, which led to extreme bungee jumping, which led to drugs, which led to hard drugs, which led to death.

He had overdosed at his parents house, where he still lived at the age of 29, despite his lucrative career and ample professional resources for finding his own dream home at a reasonable price. He rarely shot dope at home, because he was afraid his parents might find out, but they were off on a camping trip, and he had the entire house to himself for a whole week.

There was a rebellious thrill in shooting up on the same couch that his mother did her crochet. He was trying to enjoy the rush, but there was a black pain creeping in, cramping and then convulsions. He thrashed about on the sofa, muscles tight, tighter, until-

Death was a release. The pain subsided, and he stopped moving. He felt his body cool and stiffen, but it didn't hurt. Death seemed wonderful and painless, a bliss purer than he'd ever felt.

Time stopped. He didn't move because he didn't feel like moving.

Then his corpse began to rot. First, his muscles felt sore. Then his joints developed an arthritic ache. In his chest the rot felt like heart burn, and in his stomach it was hunger pains. His head throbbed with the worst migraine ever, and his eyes burned in their sockets.

He tried to move now but couldn't. He willed his arms and legs to go, but they wouldn't even twitch. He was struck by the terrible realization that he would be embalmed like this. And buried. His mind thrashed about, trapped inside his skull. He tried to scream, but his lungs wouldn't rise to gasp for air. He lay there rotting and staring at the ceiling forever, it seemed, and the pain advanced with the decay, worse by the hour, worse by the minute.

Then the garage door opened. Mom and Dad were home from their trip. His first thought was embarrassment that he hadn't had a chance to tidy up the house. He imagined the complaining his mother would do about the unwashed dishes in the sink and the porn video in the VCR, and he began to wish his parents would just go away and leave him alone.

It was a tasteless drama about to unfold in front of him when his mother found her only son dead of a heroin overdose. The needle was still hanging from his arm even. Just when he thought his day couldn't get any worse, this would add unspeakable annoyance to the unspeakable pain, which was increasing by the second.

Someone was in the kitchen. "Hello," his mother called out from the other side of the pain, already unbearable, yet growing worse by the moment, by the nano-moment.

A muscle twitched spasmodically. It was his right arm, like a charley horse. Then the cramped muscles in his neck twitched, and then every muscle in his entire body twitched at once, and he lurched upright as if from sleep.

"Hello? Douglas? We're home," announced his mother as she stepped into the living room.

Douglas quickly snatched the needle from his arm and hid it behind his back.

"My God! It smells awful in here!" she said. "What are you doing?"

He tried to speak now. His lips and tongue moved, but nothing came out. He coughed and realized he had forgotten to breathe. Funny. He could breathe if he wanted, but he felt no need to. He put his hand on his heart. It wasn't beating. He tried to make it beat but couldn't.

"Douglas, what's wrong?" said his mother, approaching him. "You don't look well." She reached out to touch his forehead, but he winced and stepped back.

"There's nothing wrong, Mom," he said. "Why don't you get me a Pepsi?"

"Do you want me to fix you a sandwich?"

"No," he said, despite considerable hunger. He hadn't eaten in days.

He was starving, in fact. Her brain smelled good. Funny how he'd never noticed before. It smelled like rib eye steak, juicy and still a little pink in the middle. Or like lamb chops. Or veal.

He licked his cold lips and grabbed her. She twisted and stumbled, and they fell, her head hitting the corner of the coffee table with the weight of two people.

The smell of brains was overwhelming now. He jumped up and rolled her over to see a gushing head wound. He picked at the hole lightly at first, and then began to dig in with his bare hands, clawing in frustration at bits of splintered skull. He ran to the kitchen, and there on the floor was the camping gear. He dug around in one of the boxes for his father's hatchet.

Her skull was surprisingly easy to open, and he ate. It was kind of like eating crab in the shell, and his stomach slowly unknotted. The hunger pains calmed, and the calm spread throughout his body, cell by cell.

Not only were brains delicious, but they made the pain go away, and he thought he could even feel the decay slowing. The sensation was incredible, better than Xanax, better than opium, even better than heroin. He had found a new habit.

He was licking the last few drops from Mom's open skull when Dad stepped into the room. His father said nothing. He just stood there wide eyed, petrified with horror, so Douglas ate him too. He had worked up quite an appetite laying dead on the couch.

It was all his parents' fault, he concluded as he dragged their bodies to the freezer in the garage. It was they who had made his life so lame. It was their idea that he go into real estate, and they both would cry if he even mentioned moving out on his own. They had encouraged him to give up every single hobby he'd ever shown any interest in.

It was all their fault his life had been so uneventful, and now they were gone. Miraculously, he had been given a second chance at life, and this time he would not squander it at the office, or going to church, or working out at the gym. From here on out he would live for one thing and one thing alone—excitement!

Excitement and brains, lots of brains. He was already beginning to feel a little hungry again, and that dull ache of rotting flesh had never really gone away. He was, after all, still dead.

Who else could he eat? Bob from work? No. His wife would report him missing. The intern, Jimmy? No. His family was well connected. They'd track down the killer, for certain. Aunt Zeta? No. With his parents missing too, he'd certainly be sought by the police.

Wait a minute. There was one person, someone he had done business with before, but who wasn't in the rolodex. It was someone he could get alone, but that he couldn't be easily connected to. And if this particular guy disappeared, well, let's just say that no one important would care.

He drove to a pay phone and dialed the number from memory. Half an hour later, he was knocking on a door in northeast, the bad part of town.

"Hey," said Douglas. "How's it going?"

"Cool makeup," said Knife.

Douglas touched his cheek. "What make up?"

Knife laughed and let him into the dark, dingy apartment. They sat in the living room under a giant poster depicting a skeletal face. The poster announced "The Misfits—Evil, Live."

"How much do you want?" said Knife, pulling his backpack out from behind the couch. "A hundred?" He had long hair that hung in his eyes, obscuring his face.

"Yeah, sure," said Douglas, standing up and approaching the poster. "What's 'The Misfits'?" he asked as he slipped the camping hatchet out from his waistband.

"The fucking greatest punk band ever," said Knife.

"Oh," said Douglas. "So, you like punk?"

"Dude." Knife held up a baggie. "A hundred bucks."

Douglas spun around and chopped at Knife's head, but he dodged, and the dull hatchet blade tore his ear and bounced off his collar bone. He screamed and fell back, dropping the baggie and clutching his dangling ear.

"You mother fucker!" Knife wailed. He reached in his back pocket and flicked out a six-inch blade. "You ain't ripping me off, you fucking yuppie!" He charged, and Douglas responded with another chop.

He looked down to see the knife sticking out of his abdomen, only an inch of the blade still visible. He looked at Knife, who was on his knees holding a spurting wound on his forehead with both hands.

Douglas laughed and pulled the knife out of his gut. No blood came from the wound, only greasy stains on the knife, and he felt no pain. No pain at all! He could feel the wound, but it was nothing compared to the pain of rotting alive.

"You're a zombie!" said Knife.

"Cool!" said Douglas. He descended on his dealer with the hatchet and knife and consumed his brain. Delicious.

While sitting there eating, Douglas had some time to admire Knife's boots, 14-eyed black Dr. Martens. He tried them on, and if they were too small and pinched his feet he couldn't really tell. Mostly, they just looked good. They looked really, really... punk. He walked around the apartment in them.

Knife's CD collection sat in an open case in front of the stereo, and a Misfits jewel box lay on top. Douglas pressed play. It was a crappy little portable stereo, but when the song started, it sounded kind of good, so he turned it up.

Brains for dinner, Brains for lunch!
Brains for breakfast, Brains for brunch!
Brains at every single meal
Why can't we have some guts?

"Wow!" He began to rifle through the rest of the CDs: the Necros, DOA, the Undead, the Dead Kennedys, the Dead Boys, Dead and Gone, Drop Dead, Dead Silence, and more.

He played some of the other discs and found the music exciting. It spoke to him, and the more he listened the more he agreed the Misfits were the greatest of them all.

A phone rang. He turned the music down, frisked Knife's remains and found a cell phone.

"Hello?" he answered.

"Hey, Knife?" said a voice.

"Uh...No...this is...Dagger."

"Let me talk to Knife. This is Andy."

"Knife's busy...but you can come over if you want."

"Really? Cool! I'll be there in, like, 20 minutes."

Dagger hung up and dragged the body into the bedroom. Then he dressed for dinner, taking Knife's wallet chains and some jeans and a t-shirt from the floor.

He examined his new look in the bathroom mirror. It was the life of a Misfits punk that he had been craving all that time. Punk rock was exciting, and more importantly, despite their fierce looks and defiant poses, punks were easy to kill. Once he'd finished off the junk-punks, he could move on to other types of punks. Half of them were criminals and drug addicts, and the other half were homeless runaways. The perfect victims!

Dagger sat on the couch and read Maximum RockNRoll until his next meal showed up.

Punk's Not Undead

Billie Jean had discovered punk rock in high school. She got her first punk tape from her best friend, Max. The music spoke to her, and it became the sound track to her delinquency. She pierced her nose and began dying her hair green.

The school jocks, led by Danny DeMaris, enjoyed heaping abuse on Billie and Max as punishment for their social deviance. Danny would call them names, grab Billie's ass and punch Max in the balls, but this

conformist terrorism only served to forge a stronger bond between the two. It was in their Senior year that they made a pact—Punk til death!

Their hatred for Danny grew so intense that they exchanged high-fives upon learning he'd been taken off the football field in a stretcher. Later, when they heard he had died of a broken neck, they felt remorse for their callousness. They hated him, but they had never wished him dead.

Still, they were not pleased the following week when Danny showed up in class wearing a neck brace. The teachers debunked the rumors that he had died. In actuality, he had been diagnosed with Progressive Necrotic Syndrome, a painful degenerative disease. He had to drop football, and he went from macho jock to feeble gimp in a short month. Teachers who hadn't noticed when Danny called someone a fag were now ever vigilant, especially around freaks like Billie and Max. Danny was different, the Vice Principal told them, but that was no reason to treat him differently.

And Danny was different. His harassment increased, but instead of punching he was always biting. To the punks, it didn't seem that he was dying of a degenerative disease so much as he was already dead. After some serious discussion over a bottle they agreed to reword their pact—Punk for life!

Three years after graduation they were still punk and still rooming together in northeast, and there was only one point of contention between the old friends. Max was bad with money.

When Billie got home from work she found Jace in the bedroom playing the guitar.

"Have you seen Max?" she asked.

"Nope, not all day. Why?"

"He owes me 12 bucks for the electric."

"Still?"

Billie went into the kitchen and found Aaron with a pair of tongs pulling a beer bottle from a boiling pot of water. He placed the empty bottle on the floor with dozens others. There was a five gallon bucket full of brown liquid on the counter.

"Have you seen Max?"

"Nope," Aaron said. He sucked on the tube from the bucket and began to siphon the brew into the bottles one by one.

"When did you see him last?" she asked.

"Last night. He said he was gonna go check out a squat."

"He never came home?"

"I don't know. I just woke up," said Aaron. The clock on the wall read 3:23pm.

Billie tracked Anna to the bathroom, where she was applying eyeliner.

"Have you seen Max?" asked Billie.

"No," said Anna. "He never came home last night, and I know why!"

"Really? Why?"

"Because he said he'd pay me for the phone bill today!"

"Today is his pay day," said Billie.

"I know! And I'm almost out of eyeliner." She continued applying the black paint. With her powdered face and blood red lipstick, the goth-punk resembled a ghoul, or a...

"You don't need anymore make up," said Billie, who wore none at all. "Are you trying to look like a zombie or something?"

"It looks good," said Anna. "I'm a creature of the night. Don't start with your necro-conspiracy theories again. I don't wanna hear it." She touched up her lipstick, straightened her fishnet, and went to her bedroom, which overflowed with clothes. Billie never would understand anyway. She only wore make up on Halloween, and even then you would never catch her in a miniskirt.

Later that evening, the four roommates cooked dinner together and ate. Then they drank some of Aaron's homebrew. There had been no sign of Max.

"That sonofabitch," cursed Billie. "I was gonna buy a sack, but he's off blowing his paycheck without us!"

"Where did he go last night?" asked Anna.

"He said he was going to check out this place on O'Bannon Street," said Aaron. "He's been real keen on finding a squat lately."

"Now we know why," cursed Anna.

Jace and Aaron had to go to band practice. They took Aaron's van, leaving Billie and Anna at the table.

"Dammit!" said Billie. "Let's just go look for the place. Maybe he's still there."

"There can't be that many abandoned houses," agreed Anna. "We can find it."

Billie put on her bike helmet, Anna put on a long black jacket, and they biked down to O'Bannon Street. First, they went north, eyeing the real estate. They pedaled past boarded up houses, a burned out duplex, some empty retail space and an abandoned gas station, but nothing that looked promising. They reached the Interstate and turned back around. They went south on O'Bannon all the way down to the river where the fast food and office space took over.

"Where the fuck is it?" complained Anna.

"Let's go back and check out that orange house again," said Billie.

They went back up O'Bannon Street and checked several possible locales but found no sign of Max or his squat. They rolled to a stop near the intersection of 18th and O'Bannon, which had a big, empty warehouse on each corner.

"Fuck it. Let's go home."

They turned up 18th Street and had pedaled about half a block when Billie slammed on her breaks. "Stop!" she said.

"What?"

"Listen."

They listened as a truck drove by.

"Listen to what?"

"Just listen!"

When traffic fell silent there was the faint crash and thud of drums and bass.

"Music," said Anna.

"Is it live?" asked Billie.

Anna pointed across the street at the sign post. "O'Bannon *Alley*," she said. "This is it!"

They rode down the alley and came to a big, old house with a red Mazda in the driveway. The music seemed to be coming from the basement, and they were close enough now to hear the guitar.

"It's a Rudimentary Peni song," said Billie. It came to an end. Somebody was shouting, and then the band took it again from the top.

Billie and Anna walked their bikes up alongside the Mazda and knocked at the side door of the house, but the band played on.

"This band kind of sucks," said Billie.

They listened. The drummer was awful. He was too slow and couldn't keep time with his own beating heart. The guitarist stunk, and the bass player had no soul.

"Total crap," said Anna, "and I *like* Rudi Peni."

Then the vocals started, and the singer screamed with such intensity it hurt. It sounded like he was blistering his vocal cords but sang on despite the pain:

*I'm a zombie, The crowd buried me
My piercing eyes, They just couldn't see
I'm a zombie, A death in their life
I'm a zombie, No peace in their strife*

When the song ended Billie and Anna knocked again loudly at the door. "Helloooooo!" they shouted. "Helloooooooo!"

They waited and heard somebody clomping around inside. The deadbolt slid back, and the door opened.

"Yeah?" said Dagger.

"Hey, I'm Billie. We're looking for Max. Is he here?"

"Max?" said Dagger, sniffing the air.

"Max. About so tall. MDC jacket."

"Oh! Right!" said Dagger. "*Max*. He's downstairs. Come on in." He stepped aside to let the ladies in, and then he bolted the door behind them. Anna raised her eyebrows and gripped her bike lock, a length of heavy chain

with a padlock on the end. Dagger led them to the kitchen and held the basement door open for them.

"He's down there," he said.

"After you," said Anna.

"Ladies first," he said.

"Age before beauty," she said.

Dagger looked at Billie. "There's beer down there."

"So what's stopping you?" asked Billie.

"Nothing. We were having band practice. Wanna watch?"

"Not if your band sucks."

"Well, we might be *too* punk for you," he said, sneering.

"Not with that poseur make up," said Billie.

"Hey!" complained Anna.

Billie ignored her, cupped her hands and shouted down the basement stairs. "Max! Are you down there?" She could see someone limping slowly up the stairs, but it didn't look like Max. She grimaced and pinched her nose. "God damn, what stinks?"

"Wait a minute!" said Dagger. "Who the fuck are you calling a poseur?"

"Well, who's pretending to be a vampire?" said Billie.

"I'm not pretending!" he said. "I'm dead!" He pointed at Anna. "Your friend here is the poseur."

Billie stepped back. "This guy's not a punk. He's a zombie!"

"I'm both!" Dagger said. "That makes me *more* punk than you."

"Fuck that," said Billie. "Punk's not dead! It's just exploited."

"No, Punk *is* dead," he insisted. "Sid Vicious, he was punk, right? Well, he's dead. Just like Darby Crash. Just like Joey and Dee Dee! Just li-"

Anna swung her bike lock underhand into Dagger's jaw. His teeth snapped shut, and the pink tip of his tongue flew from his mouth.

"My uuung!" cried Dagger. His tongue flopped on the floor in front of him. He shouted and tried to grab it, but it slipped through his fingers.

Spike appeared at the top of the stairs and lunged at Billie with the camping hatchet, but it bounced harmlessly off her bike helmet. He had a red Mohawk but no face. The flesh that hadn't rotted off had been shaved away with a knife, exposing the gory white of his skull.

Spike raised the hatchet to strike again when Bones appeared behind him and pushed him out of the way.

"Brains!" said Bones. He wore a baseball cap with "suicidal" written on the upturned bill.

"Ere ovur ere," said Dagger, pointing into the pantry.

"What?" said Bones.

"Ere even!" Dagger shouted as Anna opened the dead bolt and the two sprinted out the door.

Dagger shoved his tongue into his pocket and ran out. The band followed him.

Billie and Anna were already speeding down the alley on their bikes.

Dagger pulled out his keys and unlocked the car. He got in and started the engine, and the band fumbled with the doors.

"Hurry!" screamed Dagger.

He threw it into reverse and backed out with the doors still open. He stepped on the gas and flew up the alley to 18th Street.

"Wik way i ey go?" he said.

"What?" said Bones.

Dagger turned right, went about two blocks, saw no one, then did a U-turn and went four blocks the other way. There was no sign of the them. He rolled down his window, stuck his head out and sniffed the air, but he couldn't smell their brains. He did another U-turn, went back to O'Bannion Street and sniffed the air again. Nothing. They were gone.

"Fuck!" he shouted. He drove back to the house and herded the band back inside and down to the basement.

"Keep pacaing!" he said.

"What?" said Bones, the bassist.

"Brains," said Johnny, the drummer.

Spike didn't say anything. He played guitar but never spoke. He had always been quiet, but after Dagger shaved his skull, his jaw bone had fallen off. They'd tried to wire it back in place, but it was of no use. The muscles required to operate the jaw were gone, which meant he could hardly eat, and without brains he seemed to be decaying faster than the others.

The whole band had been losing motor skills rapidly, not to mention smarts and an occasional finger. They had been practicing for two weeks, and every day they got a little bit worse.

Dagger had even considered cruising the graveyards again for fresh replacements, but it was too late to postpone the show. The flyers had already been printed, and he'd stapled half of them to phone poles all over northeast. But now he couldn't even sing!

The only way to salvage the plan now would be to make good with the beer, which was unfortunate. Drunk-punks had proven even more gullible than junk-punks, but they tasted so much worse!

"Hello," announced an authoritative voice from upstairs. "Who's here?"

The zombies looked up.

"Is somebody here?" demanded the voice.

Dagger sniffed the air and ran upstairs. The band followed slowly.

"Hello?" said the man. He was middle-aged, and familiar looking. He wore an expensive suit and tie, but the woman on his shoulder wore a cheap dress and even cheaper heels.

"What do you think you're doing here?" demanded the man. "This is private property!"

It was Bob from the EDC, slumming it again.

Dagger flicked open his blade, and Bob's hooker bolted. She ran into the kitchen and screamed as the band tackled her.

"What do you want?" squealed Bob, backing away. "Money?"

Dagger laughed and slashed him down. He'd never liked Bob anyway. He pried his skull open and gorged on fresh cerebrum.

He had just killed his boss *and* landlord. That was *so punk!*



Aaron pulled the flyer off of the phone pole and read it again: Free Beer. It was too good to be true, so he read it again: Free Beer. Then again: Free Beer. Wow! He hurried home, eager to tell his roommates.

"Check it out," he announced. "There's a show tomorrow night with *Free Beer!*"

Billie read the flier and then ran to Anna's room. "Look at this!" she said.

"Oh my gawd!" said Anna. "O'Bannon Alley? That's where we were last night! This band—they're zombies. They're zombie *poseurs!*" She had modified her look, replacing the morgue eyeliner with Siouxsie-style Egyptian cat eyes.

"But there's Free Beer," said Aaron. "Who cares about the bands?"

"No, no!" said Billie. "There's no fucking beer. It's a trap. Don't you get it? It says 'Free Beer' so everyone'll come. And they'll show up sober. It'll be a massacre! This could wipe out the entire scene!"

"Well," said Aaron, "I guess so." What did he care? He had at least ten cases of homebrew already in bottles and another half dozen 5-gallon batches bubbling away in his room. "Pity about the scene, though."

They ran to the phone and started dialing friends.

"Hello?" answered Zipper.

"Hey, Zipper? This is Billie. How's it going?"

"Pretty good," he said.

"Hey, did you hear about this show tomorrow at O'Bannon Alley?"

"What show?"

"The one with Free Beer."

"*Free Beer*? Really? Where is it?"

"No!" she said. "Don't go! It's an ambush!"

"But—"

"The show's being put on by *zombies*. It's a trap!"

"Are you sure they're zombies? I mean—"

"Yes! Zombies! We saw them. They dressed like punks, but they were definitely zombies. We think they killed Max!"

"But that doesn't make any sense," he said. "Don't zombies hate drunks? Why would they give away beer? I mean, how much beer is there?"

"There *is* no beer!" said Billie.

"You said it was *Free Beer*!" countered Zipper. "Was that *Bannon Street*?"

"No!"

"O'Bannon!" he said.

"Dammit!" She paused and sighed. "Yeah, O'Bannon *Street*."

She hung up and looked at Anna and Aaron. "This isn't going to work. All we're doing is publicizing the show. We should be out tearing down the rest of the flyers."

"It's too late for that. The show's tomorrow!"

"What should we do?"

Aaron busted out some homebrew, and they mused over the problem until Jace came home from work.

"What's all this, then?" she demanded.

On the coffee table was a baseball bat, a crow bar, a gas mask, a flash light and three bike helmets, plus a case of the high gravity homebrew.

"We're gonna drink this beer," said Aaron, "and then we're going zombie hunting."

When the sun came up, Aaron was still puking his guts down the toilet. He had explained how the least drunk member of their anti-zombie death-squad would probably be the first to be eaten, and so they were all hung over from a night of competitive drinking. The juggernaut of destruction never got rolling until well after noon.

"There was a red car in the driveway last time," Billie said to Aaron as they crept down the alley on foot.

Jace pulled on her gas mask and gloves and gripped the flashlight. It was a big metal flashlight, and she held it like a weapon.

Billie wore a ski mask and bike helmet and gripped the baseball bat.

Aaron wore a ski mask and bike helmet and gripped the crowbar.

Anna pulled her bike lock out of her purse. She pulled her scarf up to conceal her face, but she refused to ruin her hair with a dorky looking helmet.

The side door was locked, but the dry wood of the door jam splintered easily upon application of the crowbar. They crept into the kitchen, and Billie opened the basement door. The stench of decay emanated.

"This is it," said Billie.

Jace went first with the flashlight, and the others followed her down the stairs.

"Brains?" inquired a feeble voice from below.

They raised their weapons and stepped down onto the stone floor of the basement.

"Brains!"

Jace shone her flashlight on it.

"It's the drummer," said Billie.

He was rotten, every inch of him bruised and broken, oozing wounds instead of skin. His right leg had come off at the knee, and he'd lost so many fingers his drum sticks had been duct-taped to his palms. He crawled towards them on his stumps.

"Brains!" he demanded.

"Kill it!" shouted Anna.

Billie rushed forward and clobbered the thing in the head with her bat. The skull popped open easily, splattering rancid gray matter.

Aaron felt the morning's nausea returning. "I think I'm gonna be sick," he said.

Jace swung the flashlight beam around the room. There was a brand new drum kit, guitars, amps, a gas-powered generator, and over in one corner there were piles of rotting bodies, at least a dozen of them, in various stages of decay. Their skulls had all been chopped open.

Aaron puked.

They fled the putrescence, running back upstairs and slamming the basement door behind them.

"Freeze, scumbag!" shouted an authoritative voice.

They turned to see two police officers with guns drawn. Everybody froze.

"Drop your weapon!" demanded the first cop.

Aaron dropped the crowbar with a startling clang, and the cop fired. Billie grunted and fell to the floor.

The punks ran for their lives. Through the archway was the dining room, and then the living room, which had a big wooden staircase. They had run upstairs before realizing that they weren't being pursued.

"We're trapped!" said Jace, half-whispering in fear, half-screaming in panic.

"Look!" said Aaron, pointing at a broken window. He kicked the shards of glass from the frame and climbed out onto the roof of the front porch. He could see the squad car, but not the cops, so he jumped down into the front yard and crouched silently among the weeds. Jace and Anna followed, and the three ran down the alley and around the corner to Aaron's van.

Fifteen minutes later Dagger drove past the alley and cursed under his breath. There were three police cars blocking the entrance. They'd come faster than he'd imagined. Eating scumbags was one thing, but killing someone important like Bob James had been a mistake. He should have hidden Bob's car better, because now his squat was a crime scene!

The show was a bust, but at least shopping had gone well, and Spike and Bones were in the back seat peeling the labels off the beers. Dagger took a right on Shaver and went off to find dinner elsewhere.

The tip of his tongue withered rapidly once detached, and it had melted away in his pocket by the next day. Luckily Bones could still talk, and Spike was good with the hatchet, so the Free Beer ploy worked quite well.

The next night, Dagger pulled into the long, narrow parking lot of the armory. One Day War was playing, and an ample supply of thirsty drunk-punks was certain to be had. He spotted three of them immediately, pulled up along side them and put the power windows down.

"Free Beer," Bones said from the back seat.

The punks stopped dead in their tracks. Dagger reached into the big cardboard box on the passenger's seat and handed them beers.

"Cool!" said Zipper.

"Awesome!" said Shane.

"Thanks," said Chris. "Where's the labels? Is this homebrew or something?"

Dagger shrugged and nodded.

"Punk rock," said Bones.

"Totally, man," said Chris. "Homebrew for the punks! Whoop hooo!"

"Live fast, die young," said Bones.

"Fuck yeah. You only live once. Let's fucking enjoy it!" said Chris.

"Punk rock."

"Yeah, you already said that." Chris glanced up at his friends who were drinking happily.

"Brains," said Bones. He tried to open his door, but Dagger was bidding his time and had his finger on the power lock.

Shane pointed through the window at Bones. "Hey, didn't Phil have that same Troops Of Tomorrow shirt?" he asked.

"Yeah!" said Chris. "What ever happened to that guy?"

"I dunno. I think he left town."

"Hey, where did you get that shirt, man?" Chris asked Bones.

"Hungry," said Bones.

"Where?"

"Brains," said Bones.

"Man, these guys are fucking *wasted!*" said Chris. He took a big swig off his beer as if to catch up.

Zipper peered into the car. He estimated about four cases of beer in the front seat next to the driver, and at least another two more cases in loose bottles scattered between the two guys in back.

"I gotta go take a leak," said Zipper. He put his beer in an inside pocket and went back into the show.

The other two punks continued drinking greedily, hoping to get a second bottle before the generosity expired.

"Wait a minute," said Shane. "This isn't homebrew. These are twist off caps."

Chris examined his bottle. "Didn't you say this was homebrew?"

Dagger shook his head no.

"Then why are the labels missing?" asked Chris. "What kinda beer is this?"

"Free beer," said Bones.

Dagger calculated the odds. It was three against two now, with the element of surprise on his side. He could probably get one of them with his knife, but Spike and Bones were slower, and if the other punk ran, they probably couldn't catch him. Actually, if they ran off after him, then he wouldn't need to share his own catch. That might work out just fine! He unlocked the car doors from the control panel. It took Spike and Bones a few moments to realize their doors were open, and when they did they grabbed the handles.

"Brains!" said Bones.

Then there was a ruckus. A big crowd of punks was leaving the show. It was a giant crowd. It looked like the whole crowd.

Was the show over already? Hadn't it just started? He looked at his watch.

Zipper was at the front of the mob of punks, and he was pointing at the red Mazda. The mob was moving quickly in Dagger's direction. They were coming for him!

He locked the doors, grabbed the shifter and threw it into reverse, but Bones was already half way out of the car. As Dagger stomped on the gas, Bones fell under his open door, and the car lurched as the right front tire rolled over him. The open door caught on the bumper of a parked car, and there was a crunch as the Mazda came to a stop.

Dagger threw it into drive and pulled forward a few feet to clear the door, and the car lurched as he drove over Bones again, this time crushing his head.

The mob of punks swarmed the car.

"Hey wait up, man! Do you got any beer left?" someone shouted.

"Me too!" shouted another.

This wasn't a lynch mob. They just wanted Free Beer. He'd get dinner after all! He began passing beers out his window to the eager hands of the crowd.

"Hey, me too!"

"Gimme."

They pressed up against the car, an endless supply of thirsty hands. There was pushing and shoving as some tried to move up from the back and others tried to stay put and get two or three bottles, filling their pockets.

"Hey, quit shoving, asshole!"

"Fuck off!"

The crowd surged and pushed, and the car rocked.

"Gimme one."

"Hey, what about me?"

The beer went quickly, and he was reaching the bottom of the box.

"You got lots more in back," offered one helpful mooch.

Dagger twisted around to grab more bottles from the back seat. There was no hiding it. He was going to have to give it all out, but it still might pay off.

The last few bottles went out, and the pushing stopped. Punks smiled and slapped each other on the back. They chugged their beers with a riotous passion. Who says there's no such thing as a Free Beer?

"Hey!" someone shouted. He was examining the label on his bottle, which was only half peeled. "Hey! This is O'Doul's," he announced. "This is *non-alcoholic* beer!"

The crowd gasped and studied their bottles.

"He's right," said someone else.

"What the fuck?" a voice cried.

"This is bullshit!" shouted another.

Dagger rolled up all his windows as an O'Doul's bottle broke on the asphalt. Another shattered against a nearby wall, and then the crowd began to pelt his car with bottles. An empty bottle cracked his windshield, and then a full bottle hit, and it exploded in a rain of safety glass. Then his side window shattered.

Dagger's decomposing muscles were too weak to resist the many hands that pulled him from the driver's seat.

"Fuck you!" A fist smashed into his face, and the rotting cartilage of his nose popped. Another ingrate grabbed him from behind, and Dagger was pulled into the mob. The fists came from all sides, pummeling his soft flesh,

every blow breaking the skin. An eye popped on somebody's rings, and a cheek was torn away before he fell to the ground.

Then the kicking began. Ribs cracked easily and ligaments snapped. The crowd did not know its strength, only its anger, and the rotten flesh gave way easily. Dagger's arm was torn off, and then the other. A leg went flying through the air and bounced off the hood of his car. Repeated blows to the sternum crushed his over-ripe entrails which spurted from his mouth. Finally, a steel-toed boot came down on his skull hard enough to crush it.

His cranium collapsed, squashed to a pulp, and it was only then that his severed limbs ceased twitching. With his brain smashed, he was dead, again and for good.

The gore splattered mob of punks turned their attention back to the car and saw Spike still locked in the back seat. He jiggled the door handle trying to get out, knowing if he minced the brains small enough with the hatchet he could spoon them down his exposed esophagus.

Someone opened his door, and he charged out at the nearest victim, but the mob grabbed him. His weapon was pulled from his grip, and many hands held his wrists as the crowd pressed him up against the car.

He writhed weakly.

"Awww, look at him," someone said. "A skull with a mohawk. That's *so punk!*"

"Cool."

"Hey, I got a tattoo that looks just like him!"

Hands began to fall away from Spike's wrists, and he renewed his meager struggle.

"Let him go," said someone else.

"No!" came a voice from out of the crowd. Anna jumped up onto the hood of the Mazda. "These brain eaters aren't punk," she exhorted. "They're just dead yuppies whose credit cards haven't expired yet!"

The crowd murmured.

"Yeah, they're just leeching off the scene!" added another voice from the crowd. It was Jace.

"Punk's not undead!" shouted Aaron.

The punks roared, and a furious whirlwind of boots enveloped Spike. His fragile skull was crushed and the crowd stomped him into mush.

Shane was scraping the brains off his boots when Chris returned with an axe handle and a wood baseball bat pounded full of nails.

"Shit, I missed it," Chris said.

"No you didn't!" Shane took the bat and smashed a headlight. Chris smiled, and the two proceeded to finish off the Mazda.

Zipper saw Anna, Jace and Aaron sitting on the curb looking glum. He approached them. "What's wrong, you guys?"

"Those were the zombies that ate Max," said Anna.

"Oh," said Zipper. He was silent for a moment. "Well, *good!*"

"But there's more of them out there!" said Aaron. "There's *lots* more."

"Let's get to work then," said Zipper. "Hey boys!"

Chris and Shane looked up from the car's roof.

"Wanna go brain some more zombies?" asked Zipper.

"Sure," said Chris. "But let's go get a real drink first. I gotta get this taste out of my mouth."

Next Issue: More hardcore punks against dead guys.



